DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 207 741 RC 012 915

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TITLE Acculturation and Biculturalism among Three Generations of Mexican American and Anglo American School Children.
PUB DATE [81]
NOTE 17p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Acculturation; Anglo Americans; *Biculturalism; *Bilingual Education; Bilingual Teachers; Comparative Analysis; *Cultural Awareness; Cultural Exchange; *Ethnicity; Grade 2; Grade 3; Mexican American Education; *Mexican Americans; Primary Education; Second Language Instruction; Spanish Speaking; Suburban Youth
IDENTIFIERS *California (South)

ABSTRACT

Acculturation and biculturalism of four populations (first-, second-, and third-generation Mexican American school children, and a comparison group of Anglo American children) were measured by teacher ratings of classroom behavior, using the Bicultural Identity/Respect for Cultural Differences Scale, developed expressly for use in bilingual/bicultural programs where instruction is in English and Spanish and children have opportunities to role-play characters of different cultural backgrounds. The 80 second and third graders (ages 7 to 9) were divided equally by sex and grade into each of the 4 groups. All subjects, enrolled in a semi-rural/suburban elementary school in Southern California, participated in the school's bilingual/bicultural Follow Through Program, with instruction in both English and Spanish. Results showed that of the three Mexican American groups, third-generation children were most similar to Anglo American children in their levels of acculturation with both Mexican American and Anglo American cultures. Although first-generation children were most strongly identified with Mexican American culture, they were also the most bicultural. Except for third-generation children, the trend was for all groups to be bicultural. Analysis showed no significant sex differences. Findings are discussed in terms of their implications for the development of a bicultural identity. (AW)

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ED207741

Acculturation and Biculturalism Among Three Generations of Mexican American and Anglo American School Children[1]

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[81]

Running head: Acculturation and Biculturalism

RC 012915

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Abstract

The present study tested various hypotheses concerning the acculturation and biculturalism of first-, second-, and third generation Mexican American school children. The study also included a group of Anglo American children who served as a comparison group. The study used teachers' ratings of children's classroom behavior as measures of acculturation and biculturalism. Results showed that of the three Mexican American groups, third generation children were most similar to Anglo American children in their levels of acculturation with both Mexican American and Anglo American culture. Although first generation children were most strongly identified with Mexican American culture, they were also the most bicultural. With the exception of the third generation, there was also a trend for all groups to be bicultural. Findings are discussed in terms of their implications for the development of a bicultural identity.

Acculturation and Biculturalism Among Three Generations of Mexican American and Anglo American School Children

Considering that the American southwest was once part of Mexico, it seems almost paradoxical that psychologists in this country should be studying the acculturation of Mexican immigrants to the United States. Nevertheless, historical events such as the Mexican American War, the Mexican Revolution, and the periodic need for cheap labor in the United States have created a situation wherein today the overwhelming majority of Mexican Americans trace their ancestry to Mexico to within the past seventy years. Consequently, the Mexican American population presently includes a large number of individuals with recent ancestral links to Mexico.

The present study compared the behavior of Mexican American children who are at varying generational distances from the time of their parents' or grandparents' immigration to the United States. More specifically, the study tested various hypotheses concerning the acculturation and biculturalism of first-, second-, and third generation Mexican American school children. The study also included a group of Anglo American children who served as a comparison group. Finally, in contrast to previous research which has relied primarily on paper-and-pencil instruments and older subjects, the present investigation used teacher ratings of children's classroom behavior as measures of acculturation and biculturalism.

The concepts of acculturation and biculturalism have guided most investigative efforts aimed at understanding the adjustment of Mexican Americans to the United States. Acculturation refers to "changes in cultural patterns to those of the host society" (Gordon, 1978, p. 169), and is often spoken of

in terms of cultural identity. The concept of biculturalism is closely related to acculturation but assumes that in some cases acculturation takes place without a significant loss in ancestral cultural patterns. Ramirez, Castañeda, and Cox (1977) have defined biculturalism as in integration of the competencies and sensitivities associated with two cultures within a single person.

An assumption among many researchers is that identity with Mexican American culture decreases steadily from one generation to the next. Sometimes implicit in this assumption is a corollary which holds that a decrease in Mexican American cultural identity is synonymous with acculturation or increased identity with Anglo American culture. The present study tested each of these assumptions by comparing children's level of identity with both Mexican American and Anglo American culture.

Gordon (1964) has argued that unlike their parents, immigrants' children are greatly attracted to Anglo American behavior models. At the same time though, these children's primary socialization is heavily influenced by their parents' ancestral culture. Exposure to two cultural systems therefore increases the opportunities for biculturalism among children with immigrant parents. Since these correspond to first- and second generation children in our study, it was hypothesized that these two groups would be more bicultural than their third generation counterparts.

Until now, the focus of acculturation and biculturalism research has been exclusively on immigrant groups. However, as the cultural and numerical presence of Mexican Americans in the southwest steadily increases, there may be a growing press for Anglo Americans to reciprocally accomodate to Mexican Americans. Thus from the standpoint of acculturation research, it

seems equally important to consider how well Anglo Americans are adjusting to Mexican American culture. The need for such research seems especially timely in places like California which has a long standing Spanish/Mexican heritage, a heavy influx of Mexican immigrants, and a Mexican American population that constitutes one-fifth of the state's total population (Bernal, 1981). The present study therefore examined the mutual acculturation and biculturalism of Mexican American and Anglo American children.

The present study differed from previous research primarily in its use of teacher ratings to measure acculturation and biculturalism. Teacher ratings were preferred over more traditional paper-and-pencil measures for two reasons. First, paper-and-pencil measures were developed for adolescent (Olmedo, Martinez, & Martinez, 1978) and adult (Olmedo & Padilla, 1978; Padilla, 1980; Ramirez, Castañeda, & Cox, 1977) populations and therefore may be inappropriate for use with young children. Second, the availability of bilingual/bicultural classrooms for use in the present study provided a unique opportunity to employ a teacher rating instrument developed exclusively for use in these types of educational settings. The use of such classrooms, however, potentially limits the generalizability of the findings.

Method

Subjects

A total of 80 children were subjects in the present investigation. Subjects were drawn from four populations: first-, second, and third generation Mexican Americans, and Anglo Americans. All subjects were either second or third graders between the ages of seven and nine. Twenty subjects divided

equally by sex and grade were included in each of the four groups. All subjects were enrolled at the same semi-rural/suburban elementary school in southern California and were participants in the school's bilingual/bicultural Follow Through Program. The proportion of Anglo American and Mexican American students in each classroom is approximately 25% and 75% respectively. Instruction in the Follow Through Program is in both English and Spanish for all children. In addition, children are provided with a variety of bicultural learning experiences that encourage sensitivity to both Anglo American and Mexican American cultures. All teachers in the program are fluent bilinguals.

First generation subjects included those children who were born in Mexico. Second generation subjects were born in the United States but had one or both parents born in Mexico. Third generation subjects were born in the United States and also had both parents born in this country. Anglo American subjects and their parents were all born in the United States.

The children in the present study were from low income families. The fathers of Anglo American and second- and third generation Mexican American children were employed in a variety of semi-skilled and skilled jobs. The fathers of first generation Mexican American children were employed primarily as agricultural laborers and their family incomes were slightly below that of other subjects in the study.

Measures of children's acculturation and biculturalism were obtained from teacher ratings using the Bicultural Identity/Respect for Cultural Differences Scale (Ramírez & Castañeda, 1974). The scale was developed expressly for use in bilingual/bicultural programs where instruction is in

both English and Spanish and where children have ample opportunities to role-play characters of different cultural backgrounds. The complete scale consists of three sections: Identification with Mexican American (Hispanic) Culture; Identification with "Mainstream" (Anglo American) Culture; and, Respect for Cultural Differences. Only data from the first two sections of the scale is reported here as that information is sufficient to test the hypotheses of this study. It is worth nothing though that there are no differences between the four groups on the third section of the scale, $F(3,76) = 1.13$, n.s.

The first section of the scale measures four areas of behavior characteristic of identity with Mexican American culture. The second section of the scale measures three areas of behavior characteristic of identity with Anglo American culture. At the end of every semester, teachers rate all children on the number of times they exhibit each of the behaviors described in the scale. The rating is done on the following 5-point continuum: almost always (5), often (4), sometimes (3), rarely (2), never (1). Scores for each of the two sections of the scale are summed separately and then divided by the number of items in each section to yield a possible score of 1-5 for both identity with Anglo American culture and identity with Mexican American culture. Subtracting Anglo American identity ratings from Mexican American identity ratings yields a measure of biculturalism.

As part of their summer in-service training, all teachers received extensive instruction in the use of the rating scale. Role playing techniques and video-tapes of actual teacher-student interactions were used to familiarize teachers in the use of the scale. Specific behavior criteria were also

established to instruct teachers in making a determination about what rating (1-5) a child should receive. During the first month of school an observer sat in on all teachers' classes and rated the students' behavior with the scale. These ratings were periodically compared to teachers' own ratings until there was complete agreement between the two raters. After that, teachers rated their children at the end of the first semester. That data was then collected and analyzed for use in the present study.

Results

Preliminary analyses revealed no significant sex differences and therefore this variable was dropped from the study. Acculturation hypotheses were tested by performing one-way analyses of variance on subjects' Mexican American and Anglo American Identity scores. Biculturalism was defined as the difference between subjects' Mexican American and Anglo American Identity scores. *t*-Tests were used to evaluate the significance of this difference for each group. A nonsignificant difference was interpreted to mean that a group was bicultural. A significant difference was interpreted to mean that a group was predominantly monocultural, i.e., more identified with either Mexican American or Anglo American culture. In addition, correlations were computed between subjects' Mexican American and Anglo American identity ratings to check if the direction of covariation between these variables was consistent with the definition of biculturalism. These correlations also served as a secondary measure of biculturalism.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for subjects' Mexican American and Anglo American Identity ratings, as well as the average difference between these two variables. Analysis of Mexican American Identity scores reveals a significant difference, $F(3,79) = 16.36$, $p < .01$, between the four groups. Post hoc tests show first generation subjects to be more closely identified with Mexican American culture than all three remaining groups ($p < .05$). Second generation subjects are also more strongly identified with Mexican American culture than Anglo Americans ($p < .05$). There are no significant differences between second and third generation subjects, nor between Anglo American and third generation children.

Analysis of Anglo American identity scores shows a significant difference between the four groups, $F(3,79) = 6.12$, $p < .01$. First generation subjects are less identified with Anglo American culture than all three remaining groups, ($p < .05$). There is no significant difference between second- and third generation subjects, nor between either of these two groups and Anglo American children.

Biculturalism analyses show no significant difference between the Mexican American and Anglo American identity ratings of first generation subjects, $t(18) = -.86$, n.s., but highly significant ($p < .01$) differences for the three remaining groups: second generation, $t(18) = -7.65$; third generation, $t(18) = -15.41$; Anglo American, $t(18) = -19.71$. Correlations between the two identity ratings were significant for all groups except the third generation: first generation, $r = .71$, $p < .01$; second generation, $r = .49$, $p < .05$; third generation, $r = -.01$, n.s.; Anglo American, $r = .72$, $p < .01$).

Discussion

Overall, children's Anglo American identity ratings were higher than ratings for identity with Mexican American culture. Inspection of Table 1 shows, for example, that the lowest, mean Anglo American identity rating slightly exceeds the highest mean rating for identity with Mexican American culture. Even among the most "Mexican" first generation children, Anglo American identity ratings are as high as their ratings for identity with Mexican American culture. This suggests the presence of a strong environmental press for the incorporation of Anglo American culture which outweighs the press for retention of Mexican American culture. While this does not preclude the formation of a bicultural identity, it may mean that, at least for young children, the "Mexican" component of this bicultural identity will receive less reinforcement and thus develop more slowly than the "American" component. These rates of development may be altered later in life, though, as individuals assume greater control in choosing their preferred cultural milieus.

Although identity with Mexican American culture decreases significantly between the first- and second generation, both groups express a stronger identity with their ancestral culture than Anglo American children. Only third generation children do not differ from Anglo American children in their identity with Mexican American culture. Two things may account for this non-significant difference. First, since third generation children no longer have any direct parental links to Mexico, there is a diminished probability that the ancestral culture will be reinforced at home. Consequently, third generation children may be disinterested in the efforts of bilingual/bicultural

schools to promote a positive cultural identity. Secondly, in contrast to third generation children, indirect evidence suggests that Anglo American children may receive parental support for learning about Mexican American culture. For instance, during informal conversations with Anglo American parents, many expressed the belief that their children could benefit socially and economically in the future by learning about Mexican American culture and the Spanish language. Thus exposure to bilingual/bicultural education may raise Anglo American children's identity with Mexican American culture to the same level as the less "Mexicanized" third generation. The fact that Anglo American children express the same level of cultural identity as third generation children suggests that, at least in communities where Mexican Americans are in the majority, there may be a press for other groups to adopt aspects of Mexican American culture.

Despite the fact that first generation children are the most "Mexicanized" in terms of their cultural identity, they are nevertheless the most bicultural. This finding indicates that identity with Mexican American culture does not prevent the development of an identity with Anglo American culture. In fact, the significant positive correlation between the two sets of identity ratings for first- and second generation children indicates that for these Mexican American students, identity with Anglo American culture tends to be greatest among those individuals having the strongest identity with their ancestral culture. This finding challenges the assertions of some social scientists (e.g., Heller, 1966; Stonequist, 1964) who argue that retention of ethnic subcultures prevents the development of an American sense of identity.

At least for first- and second generation children whose early socialization is heavily influenced by Mexican American culture, embeddedness in

the ancestral culture may provide rewarding personal experiences and feelings of self-worth and security. This in turn may encourage and facilitate exploration of new cultural avenues and the formation of a bicultural identity. However, since the early socialization of third generation children is probably less influenced by Mexican American culture, individuals in this group are more likely to adopt a preponderance of Anglo American behaviors as part of their original repertory of cultural traits. Although this accelerates acculturation for third generation children, it reduces the probability for development of a bicultural identity as reflected in the nonsignificant correlation between the two identity ratings for this group of children.

The present study examined the relationship of generational status to acculturation and biculturalism among young, elementary school children. To date, studies of acculturation and biculturalism have focused primarily on adolescent and adult populations. Consequently we know very little about the factors associated with the early development of these two important personality dimensions. In the future, research with young children can potentially increase our understanding of acculturation and biculturalism among adults since many life-long attitudes toward out-groups are formed during early childhood (Triandis, 1971). In addition, the belief that childhood experiences play a key role in shaping adult personality is paramount in many prominent theories of personality (Hall & Lindzey, 1970).

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Footnote

[1]Requests for reprints should be sent to the author at the Psychology Department, Mason Hall, Pomona College, Claremont, CA 91711.

Table 1

Identity Ratings and Average Differences

Groups	Identity with Mexican American Culture	Identity with Anglo American Culture	Difference: Mexican American Identity Minus Anglo American Identity
First Generation Mexican American	3.8 (.86)	3.9 (.89)	-0.11 (.60)
Second Generation Mexican American	3.0 (.98)	4.5 (.67)	-1.5 (.87)
Third Generation Mexican American	2.6 (.52)	4.78 (.33)	-2.1 (.62)
Anglo American	2.0 (.83)	4.5 (.62)	-2.5 (.56)

Note: n=20 for all groups. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.